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Small grants in the region

Three small grants have been awarded in Nepal, bringing the total grants in the region to 55. Of these 22 projects are in India, 18 in Nepal and 15 in Bhutan. Twenty-one grants are for studies on mammals, 9 on birds, 5 on herpetofauna and 10 on plants. Several grants have also been awarded for conservation actions.

The latest grants were given to a study to understand indigenous peoples' perception of the impacts of climate change in eastern Nepal, training nature guides in Chitwan National Park and for a biodiversity assessment of the Koshi Tappu wildlife reserve, also in Nepal, following the 2008 floods.

More details on all projects are available on the small grants page at www.panda.org/easternhimalayas/cepf.

For more information

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Street theatre campaign against poaching

FECOFUN, a federation of community-forest user groups, recently organized street theatre productions in nine places in the adjacent villages of Bardia National Park in Nepal, to raise awareness about wildlife conservation and to campaign against poaching. The shows attracted an audience of over 5000 people in total. The area where these shows were held is part of an important biological corridor for large mammals such as elephant and rhino.

FECOFUN's project aims to reduce wildlife trade and other illegal harvesting activities through community-based initiatives in and around the Bardia National Park. The organization has helped form anti-poaching groups at the community level and is working to set up a community-based wildlife monitoring system.

For more information

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© Rita Singh

▲ A cycad

Plant studies in northeast India

A focus of CEPF small grants in the region is the generation of reliable scientific information on key animal and plant species to improve their conservation status.

In northeast India, six small grants have been given out to study key plant communities and species. Four of these are for action-oriented research and two for doctoral research studies in conservation science.

J.S.Rawat, a researcher with the project to survey Himalayan Yew (*Taxus baccata*) and Indian madder (*Rubia cordifolia*) in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, carried out an initial survey recently. The preliminary assessment showed sparse and scattered growth of Himalayan Yew in some areas, as well as large scale exploitation. Seedlings were conspicuously absent in parts, perhaps because of browsing livestock. Indian madder was seen growing in abundance in secondary forests in parts of the study area.

Hui Tag is studying the status and documentation of selected medicinal plants in Pakhui Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh. Many of these plants are over-exploited in the wild and Hui has been working with the local *gauburas* (village headmen), who are active bio-resource managers in the community, through village level workshops to help conserve these plants in the wild. Two field explorations have been carried out so far in the Sanctuary. The study also has an ethnobotanical component and information for this is being gathered from elders and traditional healers in the villages around the Park.

Lalit Kumar Rai has just completed a survey of rhododendrons in Sikkim. Two of the target species of the study were not found during

the survey of the areas from which they were earlier reported. One out of the two (*R. pumilum*) may be introduced again from eastern Nepal but *R. sikkimense*, which is an endemic species, is possibly irrecoverable. A third species, *R. niveum*, is threatened by habitat loss from avalanches. It is disturbing that *Rhododendron sikkimensis*, a species endemic to the Sikkim Himalayas, was not traceable in the present study.

Rita Singh, the researcher on the project to survey the status and develop a conservation action plan for cycads (*Cycas pectinata* complex) in the North Bank landscape, carried out a survey in the Nameri National Park and Tiger Reserve. Not a single Cycas plant has been found in the two field explorations in the area indicating that the cycad population may have been wiped out from the region. The collection and sale of cycas cones is a common practice in Assam. In the next phase, Rita plans to survey the north west part of the Nameri National Park and the areas adjoining Southern Bhutan and Sikkim.

In addition to the above projects, two doctoral research studies have been funded.

Bhaskar Saikia, who is studying the genus *Dioscorea*, a type of yam, in Arunachal Pradesh, has initiated activities to raise awareness among villagers to reduce the consumption of wild *Dioscorea*, to cultivate the plants in their home gardens and to protect wild plants during slash-and-burn agriculture. *Dioscorea* is a vital food crop, particularly in economically poor households. A major problem for the conservation of the species is the unsustainable harvesting of wild tubers.

Anand Gazmer is studying the distribution of vegetation types as a function of elevation and their response to climate change in the sub-alpine and alpine regions of the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya. This work will focus on a few select plant groups and a pilot survey of areas in North Sikkim and Darjeeling has been done so far. The study will also look at the possible conservation and social implications of the impacts of climate change on plant communities.

[For more information](#)

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Review workshop for small grants in Nepal

Over forty people participated in the review workshop for small grant recipients held on 16 June 2009 in Kathmandu. Sixteen of the eighteen grantees in Nepal presented project progress, which was reviewed and commented on by experts in herpetology, conservation biology, wildlife ecology, ornithology and mammalian biology. CEPF grant coordinators from Bhutan and India were also present at the event to take back ideas and apply them in their work.

Comments that will help improve the execution of projects and obtain useful information will be integrated into implementation.

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Study compares briquette and firewood performance

A recent study by the Ugyen Wangchuk Institute for Conservation and Environment in Bhutan compared the performance of



▲ The briquette production machine at Norden Pines, Bumthang, Bhutan

firewood against briquettes made of sawdust. Briquettes for the study were provided by Norden Pines, recipient of a CEPF grant to produce alternative fuel from sawdust and other wood waste.

The comparative study on the performance of briquettes and firewood in cooking showed that briquettes were more expensive than firewood, if the time and number of people required to chop wood was not taken into account. It also took a longer time to cook food over briquettes. On the other hand, briquettes produce less smoke than firewood. They are produced from waste from saw mills, waste engine oil, withered pine leaves and used paper, and are thus environmentally friendly. The use of these materials also takes care of the problem of waste disposal.

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Transboundary conservation workshop in Nepal

Thirty-three participants representing government and non-government organizations in India and Nepal met to discuss transboundary conservation issues, strategies and coordination mechanisms.

The porous boundary between India and eastern Nepal is vulnerable to illegal wildlife-related activities such as poaching and trade in protected species. A protected area has been declared on the Indian side of the border in Sikkim and West Bengal, but the land on the Nepali side is owned either by the government, private individuals or the community, creating opportunities for illegal harvesting of natural resources. In addition, conservation policies on either side of the border do not match, particularly with regard to resource use. Forests are managed by communities in Nepal whereas forests on the Indian side are under strict protection.

The multitude of NGOs based in Sikkim and West Bengal in India and in the Ilam, Panchthar and Taplejung districts of Nepal

are in an ideal position to bring together district-level government officials for discussions on transboundary issues.

The meeting organized by NCDC brought together district officers from Ilam and Panchthar in Nepal, and forest department officials from Sikkim and Darjeeling in India, as well as NGOs from either side of the border. The meeting identified issues of importance to transboundary conservation such as policy, resource management, coordinated conservation, illegal activities and trade, tourism, forest fires and climate change, and explored mitigation strategies.

At the meeting, an ad-hoc committee was formed to develop an action plan on transboundary conservation issues and to improve coordination between the two countries.

The meeting was held as part of the NCDC's project, funded by CEPF, to reduce unsustainable use of forest resources.

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The transboundary area between eastern Nepal and India

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The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a global programme that provides grants to nongovernmental organizations and other private sector partners to protect critical ecosystems. It is a joint programme of Conservation International, l'Agence Française de Développement, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank.

To apply for a CEPF grant, all applicants must submit a Letter of Inquiry (LOI), when calls for LOIs are advertised on the websites www.panda.org/easternhimalayas/cepf and www.cepf.net. The call for proposals will also be advertised in major national newspapers. Guidelines and format for developing LOIs are available on www.cepf.net.

In the Eastern Himalayas region, WWF leads the regional team responsible for facilitating, coordinating and monitoring grants for CEPF-supported conservation projects.

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